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Latin America Weekly Review

2 February 1978

Declassified and
Approved for Release
July 2000

~~Secret~~

27 February 1978

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Human Rights Developments

The Chilean Government has let stand a court ruling that provides considerable relief to 12 Christian Democratic Party leaders banished to the inhospitable northern province of Arica. While rejecting habeas corpus petitions, the court said the in-country exiles could choose their residence within the province, and all have now moved to the resort area on the coast. The Supreme Court president indicated, however, that had the government appealed, he would rule in favor of the contention that under state of siege powers, authorities can specify the banishment locale. The absence of a government appeal is probably to the credit of Ambassador to the US Cauas, who we think made a strong plea for moderation in the case.

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Chile: Overhauling the Foreign Ministry

Chile's isolation in the world community has prompted President Pinochet to reorganize his Foreign Ministry to give greater priority to the cultivation of friendly ties abroad. By assigning Army men to several top positions, Pinochet will also have a more direct role in day-to-day formulation of policy.

The timing could not be more inappropriate, since Chile is currently embroiled in a serious border dispute with neighboring Argentina. By bringing in new persons with little background in foreign policy matters, Pinochet may be weakening his country's position.

The decision to institute major changes in the Ministry was announced after the January referendum when Pinochet declared that his government would pursue a more "aggressive" foreign policy. What he clearly wants is closer political and economic links with other conservative regimes that can be counted on to support Chile in international forums. While concern over Chilean isolation is a paramount consideration, Pinochet is also aware of the need for closer allies because of Chile's potentially troublesome border problems with neighboring Argentina and Peru.

The creation of a new vice ministerial position will allow greater flexibility for both the incumbent and the foreign minister to travel outside the country. With higher rank and prestige allocated to the new post, the official will be able to deal more effectively with his counterparts abroad. The government has devoted increasing attention to personal diplomacy in its efforts to repair the country's poor image.

Decree laws reorganizing the Foreign Ministry will enable Pinochet to establish new staffing levels and give him additional latitude in selecting personnel. The Chilean diplomatic service, which is small to begin with, has been weakened by the political purges since the 1973

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